

WAS NOT HIS JOKE

Howard Fielding Pursues It but
Doesn't Catch It.

THE OTHER MAN'S GOT AWAY

He Afterwards Catches a Little One of
His Own and Loses His Job as
Account of It—Dismal Failure.

Forty years ago or less I was engaged in committing grave literary offenses at the rate of one per week, at the instigation of a publisher who has never been adequately punished. Far be it from me to stir up popular resentment against him at this late day. On the contrary, I hasten to say that he was in some respects a very good man, full of generous impulses which he controlled in a masterly manner. For instance, he insisted upon inserting in our contract a clause giving him the right to raise my pay at any time, without notice; and yet, though this almost autocratic power would have been a



"TAKE MY ADVICE, DON'T WRITE ANY MORE."

temptation to most men, it never moved him from the straight and very narrow way of duty to himself.

The weekly burden which I laid upon my conscience by the terms of this agreement was of that character which, Hamlet says, "cannot but make the judicious grieve," but, among the judicious, I think none grieved more heartily than I. Yes; my inward monitor had much to say in those days, but it was no match for my landlady. In a matter of talking, she, being a woman, had a great natural advantage, and I generally wrote my little screed within forty-eight hours after rent was due.

My chief difficulty lay in the choice of a subject. It was necessary, my publisher said, to select a theme which was timely and interesting to everybody; had never been dealt with before, and would permit an abundance of humorous and satirical comment, warranted not to offend the most delicate sensibilities.

When he outlined these requirements to me, I could not help thinking of a good friend of mine who lost his job by writing a funny story about the all-permeating use of celluloid for a paper whose editor-in-chief wore cuffs of that serviceable material.

It was easier, perhaps, to avoid these dangerous matters than to select such as were timely, and also fit for humorous treatment. I never realized before how badly this world goes.

"Take the news of the day," said my publisher.

"But, my dear sir," said I, "the news of the day, as I read it in the papers, consists of a wife murder in Indiana, a six-barreled bigamy case in Hoboken, and the death of Hon. Richard C. Bellmura. These are not subjects for levity."

"Then take the famine in County Sligo," he replied.

"I don't know anything about County Sligo, I've never been there. But I know altogether too much about famine. I have been there; and I can lay my hand upon my stomach and swear that there's no fun in it."

In this agreeable manner I endeavored to ward off unprofitable suggestions without discouraging my publisher, for I hoped that some day he would bob up with an idea more fertile of laughter than were these pictures of crime and starvation. But the world went on as before, and its leading events continued to be "far, far from gay."

I dipped into politics occasionally without mentioning parties by name, but the result was far from satisfactory. My stories were sent to a score or more of papers for publication. I had



"THERE IS NO FUN IN FAMINE."

created a typical politician named Swagley, and the whig editors thought he was a whig, and the democratic editors thought he was a democrat, and they all sent the matter back with requests that I be kept off dangerous ground in future.

I satirized Chicago for awhile and escaped criticism because the stories were not sent to that city; but by and by the publisher secured a victim out here, and I had to change the name of the place to a fictitious one. Then some of the editors said that the stories were potshotted, and others were afraid their readers would suppose that their own town was meant, and so I had to switch off to another track.

About this time the publisher approached me with a suggestion which was so funny that he could not control his mirth while he told it to me. I was able to control my own, and yet the idea had certain elements of availability. I thought it would be worth while for me to use it in order to please him, so I promised that my next week's contribution should be upon this subject.

There is nothing so elusive as another man's joke. When it was time to write the funny part of my publisher's story it had escaped. For hours I chased it up and down the imaginary corridors of my brain, and the funny

late gray matter glimmering faintly in the darkness; but I did not catch it. Then I went to bed and dreamed of everything that is cheerful and sad.

I did not lay my customary offering upon the shrine of my mirth, that week or the next. My landlady's voice had lost its power to inspire. I resolved to write a story on my publisher's suggestion before putting my pen to anything else; and I stuck to that resolution for three weeks more. By that time the famine in Sligo seemed like mild and voluntary abstinence beside my condition.

By and by I went to the publisher and apologized for my delay. I told him that I was not in a proper mood to do so good an idea as his the justice it deserved. I hinted that perhaps it would be well for me to let his suggestion rest a little while, and turn to something else. I hated to see the publication of the stories suspended for so long. It seemed to me that if they were kept running the public might in time become inured to them. But the suspension of the letters was nothing to the suspension of my bill for lodgings which was hanging so high that I was afraid it would never come down. Therefore I prayed for leave to choose some other subject, and to go on writing stories and drawing pay, and eating occasionally, as in the long ago. The publisher mildly called my attention to a clause in our contract which bound me to work up such exceptional valuable ideas as were given me by him. I did not dispute him. If he had told me that there was a clause forbidding me to breathe more than once in four weeks I should have believed him.

"But take your own time," said he; "I can wait."

Well, perhaps he could, but delay was getting dangerous for me. This suggestion which he had so kindly given me had already cost me nearly two months' pay, and the deprivation promised to be eternal. But that night I wrote the story. I did it ruthlessly at or about the solemn midnight. The next day I dropped it on the publisher's desk, and asked for a check before it had fairly hit the blotter.

The publisher examined the manuscript slowly, and then he shook his head.

"No man should ever write for money," said he. "A mercenary spirit is fatal to literary success. Now I'll tell you what you ought to do. Just take this sketch back to your room and re-



ONCE MORE FOR LUCK.

write it without a thought of remuneration."

Then I remonstrated. I said that money was proper and necessary especially in a restaurant where one didn't have credit. But he called my attention to our contract, and I didn't want to hear what part of it he wished to utilize in this controversy. I knew by this time that whenever the contract came out I was lost.

I called upon him again about a month later, having in the meantime rewritten the story. I was becomingly attired on this occasion in a suit of clothes which, some years before, I had vainly tried to give away. My visit did not profit me financially, but I obtained a valuable idea. When the publisher told me his story, I had not given particular attention to the part which he himself played in it. Now, however, it all came to me in a flash that the reason he didn't like my treatment of it was that I had not given him sufficient prominence.

I went home and remedied the defect. Every incident in the remodeled sketch centered about the publisher. He had the stage all the time and whatever he said impressed the hearers to the verge of hypnosis.

But he wasn't satisfied. He said the story lacked humor. I took it home and wrestled with it. Suddenly the funniest idea in the world caught me. I perceived a way to so modify the publisher's character (as depicted by me) that it would be much nearer the original, and would make an undertaker laugh.

I introduced him by the name of Mr. Howstrader, and when the story was done he had everything but a clear conscience and nobody else in it had anything. It seemed to me that it was the best thing I had ever done, and I felt sure he would be pleased with it.

Oh, how tickled he was. He read with an expression of steadily deepening gloom, and when he reached the end he looked like a man who had just gone through his own obsequies in a manner highly unsatisfactory to himself.

"I'll tell you what it is, Fielding," said he, "you've mistaken your vocation. You haven't any real call to write. Now I'm going to release you from this contract. You've violated sections 1, 14, 75 and 93 already, but never mind; you'll be better off out of it. Just get a quiet business position somewhere, clerking in a store or running an elevator. You can make \$7 or \$8 a week, and by frugality you can soon have an interest in the business. But take my advice, and don't write any more. It isn't in you."

Howard Fielding.

The Grip

Leaves its victims very weak and debilitated. Hood's Sarsaparilla is just what is needed to restore the strength and vigor so much desired and to expel all poison from the blood.

Hood's Pills cure sick headache.

Quincy troubled me for twenty years. Since I started using Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil I have not had an attack. The oil cures sore throat at once. Mrs. Letta Conrad, Standish, Mich., October 24, '93.

My physicians said I could not live, my liver out of order, frequently vomiting greenish mucus, skin yellow, small dry humors on face, stomach would not retain food. Burdock Blood Bitters cured me. Mrs. Adelaide O'Brien, No. 373 Exchange street, Buffalo, N. Y.

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The eustachian tubes are small tubes, about two inches long, leading from the upper and back part of the throat to the middle ear. Their use is to permit the passage of air inside the drum-head of the ear. An ordinary drum would be worthless unless a small hole is made in the barrel to allow the pressure of air to be equal on both sides of the drum-head. So it is with the middle ear; the atmospheric pressure must be equal on both sides, that the drum-head (tympanum) shall be sensitive to respond to the delicate vibrations of air called sound. If anything happens to obstruct the eustachian tubes hearing is very much impaired, if not entirely destroyed. Catarrh of the throat most commonly follows up these little ducts to the middle ear, thickening their mucous linings so as to completely or partially close them up, producing partial deafness. The roaring and crackling sounds which catarrh subjects so frequently complain of is due to the spread of the catarrh to these tubes.

Per-na is the best, if not the only, remedy that will cure these cases. Taken regularly according to the directions on the bottle the symptoms gradually disappear until a complete cure is the result. In some cases it takes months to effect a cure, while in others only weeks are required, as in the following:

Mr. Frederick Bierman of McComb City, Miss., had chronic catarrh very badly for many years. The disease finally passed up the eustachian tube into the middle ear, and had almost destroyed his hearing. He has been taking Per-na but a short time, and his catarrh is very much better, and he hears again as well as anyone.

Colds, winter coughs, bronchitis, sore throat, and pleurisy are all catarrhal affections and consequently are quickly curable by Per-na. Each bottle of Per-na is accompanied by full directions for use, and is kept by most druggists. Get your druggist to order it for you if he does not already keep it. A pamphlet on the cause and cure of all catarrhal diseases and consumption sent free to any address by the Per-na Medicine Co., Columbus, Ohio.

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For tickets, maps, pamphlets and full information apply to A. A. Jack, D. P. A. Wis. Cen., Detroit, Mich., or Jas. C. Pond, General Passenger and Ticket Agent, Chicago, Ill.

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Peckham's Croup Remedy cures whooping cough.

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S. H. Clifford, New Cassel, Wis., was troubled with Neuralgia and Rheumatism, his stomach was disordered, his liver was affected to an alarming degree, appetite fell away, and he was terribly reduced in flesh and strength. Three bottles of Electric Bitters cured him.

Edward Shepard, Harrisburg, Ill., had a running sore on his leg of eight years' standing. Used three bottles of Electric Bitters and seven boxes of Bucken's Arnica Salve, and his leg is sound and well. John Speaker, Catawba, C., had five large liver stones on his leg, doctors said he was incurable. One bottle Electric Bitters and one box Bucken's Arnica Salve cured him entirely. Sold by Peck Bros., drug store.

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